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# GURU GOBIND SINGH

( A UNIQUE NATIONAL HERO )

by

**Dr. KHUSHDEVA SINGH**

Prof Dr. Harbham Singh Shan  
Principal Project Investigator  
U.G C. Research Project on Sikhism  
605, Sector 16, Chandigarh.

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# GURU GOBIND SINGH

## *A UNIQUE NATIONAL HERO*

Guru Gobind Singh was a versatile genius, who was a saint, a social reformer, a scholar, a soldier, and a statesman of a very high order, all at one and the same time and every facet of his life shone with dazzling brilliancy. He poured out most liberally all his talents for the love of God and for the service of the mankind and infused his overwhelming spiritual might into his disciples.

His work has sometimes been misunderstood and the martial spirit inculcated by him is regarded as a reversal of the teachings of the founder of the faith. This, however, is not correct if one tries to make a proper assessment keeping in view the historical and social background of that time especially pertaining to the Gurus.

(1) The foundation of Sikh religion was laid by Guru Nanak. He started his struggle against political tyranny and religious intolerance and travelled all over the country and abroad to spread his message against injustice, cruelty and hypocrisy.

When the army of Babar sacked the town of 'EMINABAD' and persecuted its people, Guru Nanak felt much distressed and cried out to the Lord-"So much was the suffering caused by the aggression to the poor that

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they were all crying out to you; how is it that you felt no compassion on them?"

Since then all the Gurus in their time struggled against the tyranny of the ruling class and underwent great sufferings. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, was tortured to death under the orders of Jahangir. Guru Hargovind, the sixth, was arrested and kept as a prisoner in Gwalior for a number of years while he was yet a child. Guru Hari Rai was called to Delhi to appear before the emperor, and Guru Hari Krishen died of small-pox while at Delhi under the emperor's orders. Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested and imprisoned in Delhi under conditions of extreme hardship and was executed in CHANDNI CHOWK of the capital on his refusal to abjure his faith.

In spite of all the sufferings that the Gurus underwent and the sacrifices they made, there was no change in the policy of the Mughal rulers. If anything, the edge of barbarity had become sharper during the time of Aurangzeb.

(2) Guru Nanak started seva (community service) and Langar (community kitchen) to draw together all castes and classes into one brotherhood and the rich and poor and the high and low combined into one fraternity, one mighty union of service and sacrifice — a living witness to one God. The nine succeeding Gurus kept on to this line developing it slowly. The disciples were sincere and devoted and had accepted the abolition of the caste system. Yet he found that in practice the whole work had not taken deep roots and the society was

still ridden with the caste malady. Even at Anandpur the hill chieftains of the neighbourhood became a source of trouble to the Guru, because they were orthodox Hindus and did not tolerate the rising of a casteless society.

Caste had so much divided the people that when Guru Gobind Singh sent some Sikhs to Banares, to learn Sanskrit, the Pandits refused to teach them because they belonged to the lower castes.

(3) By the time of Guru Gobind Singh the number of Sikhs had risen to many lacs spread all over the country. They were honest and devoted disciples who came to visit the Guru at least once in a year with offerings to the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh found out that they were all suffering from inferiority complex. After the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev no protest had been made by any one. At the time of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, his body lay unclaimed in the 'CHANDNI CHOWK' Delhi and no one dared come forward even to claim it for fear of the wrath of the Emperor. This showed the moral degeneration of the people with the terror struck in them by the Mughal Government.

(4) Guru Amar Dass had started an institution of Sikh missionaries commonly known as Massands, with a view to spreading the teachings of the Guru in the various parts of the country and to receive the disciples' offerings to be passed on to the Pontiff. This work went on satisfactorily for some years. With the passage of time they came to neglect their duties and became oorrup, leading luxurious lives. Some of them even started



getting themselves worshipped. By the time of the Tenth Guru they had become a regular menace. Guru Gobind Singh abolished this institution and established direct connection with the disciples.

(5) Since the time of Guru Ram Dass, when the succession to the gaddi was confined to his own house, intrigues for succession to the gaddi became acute. Some of them who were Guru's own kith and kin at times, approached the Mughal Emperor who found intervention in the Guru affairs through these intrigues, a handy device to strike at the Sikh movement.

Guru Hargovind shifted his seat of Guruship from Amritsar to Kiratpur to remove himself away from the neighbourhood of the seat of the provincial government at Lahore and from the jealous and intriguing members of his family. Guru Tegh Bahadur moved on to the village of Makhawal, later on known as Anandpur, at the foot of the Shivaliks, to be in a more secluded place. This, too, did not prove helpful, as the caste-ridden Hindu hill chieftains could not tolerate in their midst the establishment of casteless society by the Guru and they became a source of trouble to him.

It was under such difficult circumstances that Guru Gobind Singh had to work. The Guru made just following, in spirit, the programme of his predecessors brought into play all his qualities of the head and heart, and developed ways and means which could pull out the people from the slough of despair and prepare them to

defend themselves against religious intolerance and political tyranny.

He inspired his followers with a sense of dignity and courage. For this purpose he translated several of the ancient epics into simple language of the people. He also encouraged them to develop their physique, and to get interested in the use of arms. It surely goes to his credit that out of the depressed and suppressed rabble, drawn from the so called low castes, who could not even touch a sword, he produced a formidable army which successfully fought many a relentless war against tyranny and oppression.

Guru Nanak had started his work on a quieter note. What happened in the time of Guru Gobind Singh was a historical necessity brought about by the peculiar circumstances of the situation. The importance and significance of his daring exploits and his tragic sacrifices where in he gave away his all-his father, his mother, his four sons and his very hearth and home for the service of the country has yet to be fully understood and appreciated.

### *A RELIGIOUS LEADER*

Guru Gobind Singh was primarily a religious leader. Even as a child he used to sit in meditation for long time like his father. It was spirituality again which prompted him at the age of nine to suggest to his father, "to lay down his life for the cause of *Dharma*".

As he grew, he imbibed more and more of



spiritualism, and developed an intensely saintly disposition, completely surrendered to the will of God. His inspiration and mainstay was faith in God and His goodness.

His writings like *Jap* and *Akal Ustat*, *Swaiyas* and the like are songs in praise of God Almighty which can only come from a spiritually intoxicated soul.

In the *Zaffarnama*, he wrote to Aurangzeb, "Thou hast Empire, wealth, pomp and show but far from thee is religion. My protection is God than whom there is no one higher and stronger. How can an enemy touch him whose friend and saviour is God on High."

Whether in war or in peace he always lived with God. He had to leave his home and everything in the hands of the enemy. His family dispersed, his ranks depleted, he saw his two elder sons die in the battle field of Chamkaur. Passing through all these hardships and acute crises when he reached Machhiwara jungle, and reclined there for a moment, he burst into an intensely devotional song expressing that all his losses counted for nothing if He was with him.

When he received the news of the brutal murder of his two young sons and the tragic death of his mother he entered into a prayer and said, "O God! There is nothing that's mine; All that is me belong to Thee. When I surrender to thee what is Thine, O what is it then that belongs to me."

He faced all the hardships as if nothing had



happened and went on with his work with supreme composure.

it is quite significant that after a close contact with the Guru, for more than a year, Bahadur Shah acknowledged and treated him as a real saint, a Darvesh.

### A GREAT SCHOLAR

Guru Gobind Singh had the rare quality of wielding his pen and sword with equal facility and for one purpose i. e in the praise of God and for the inspiration of His people. The Guru wrote volumes of chivalrous and devotional verse and these were later on collected into a single volume of about 1300 pages called *Dasam Granth* or the Book of the Tenth Guru. This holy Book is mostly written in Brij Bhasha. Its contents are :

- (1) The *Jap* or meditation;
- (2) The *Akal Ustat* or the praise of the Lord ;
- (3) The *Chandi Charitra*, the exploits of Chandi. the goddess of war ;
- (4) The *Var* or Ballad ;
- (5) *Gyan Prabodh*, the exposition of knowledge ;
- (6) The *Chaubis Avtar* or stories of the 24 incarnations of God according to the Hindus ;
- (7) The *Shabd Hazara* or the devotional hymns ;
- (8) Thirty three *Swayas* or the praise of the Immortal one ;
- (9) The *Khalsa Mehma* or the words in praise of the Khalsa ;

- (10) *Bachittar Natak*, autobiographical sketch;
- (11) The *Shastar Nam Mala* or verses in praise of arms;
- (12) The *Charitro Pakhyan* or the tales of the wiles of women;
- (13) The *Zaffarnama*, an Epistle of in Persian addressed to Emperor Aurangzeb;
- (14) The *Hikayats* or the legends and tales :

In poetry his verse is incomparable for its sublimity of style and virility of content. It is unexcelled in sweep of imagination, choice of words and phrases and mastery over metre. He can be classed as the best Hindi poet of his time.

His *Bachitra Natak* a kind of an autobiography gives many interesting and inspiring details of his life. He had an ideal literary prose style, achieved by conscious artistry, dialogue and descriptive forms.

Aurangzeb had expelled poets and musicians out of his court. Some of them came to the Guru who welcomed them and employed them. These poets, scholars and musicians were given full freedom to translate or recreate any classic in any language. In this way several ancient epics were translated into simple language. The soulstirring legends from classics and epics presented to the people the mystic glories of their past and filled them with lofty desire for freedom, and, in this way the Guru succeeded in boosting up the morale of a fallen people in whom he rekindled the embers which had died out since long.



## A SPIRITUAL COMBATANT

Guru Gobind Singh was a man of peace and wished to live in peace with himself and with all around him. His immediate neighbours, the hill *Rajas*, however, became a source of great trouble to him as they were orthodox Hindus and could not tolerate the establishment of a casteless society in their jurisdiction. They were also jealous of the splendour of the Guru's *darbar*, his growing popularity and his ever-increasing hold over non-muslim population of the area. They could only be satisfied if the Guru either stopped his preachings or left Anandpur. Both these things were impossible for the Guru. Anandpur was his ancestral property — his legally owned hearth and home — and the preaching of Sikhism was his duty as a Guru.

The Guru explored all avenues of peaceful settlement but failed to reconcile the hill chiefs. They started all sort of provocations which the Guru ignored. Last of all, they joined hands and marched upon the Guru while he was at Paonta. Now there was no other alternative for him then to fight back.

It was only when all the avenues of peace had failed that the great Guru declared it lawful to take to the sword. When the Hindu *Rajas* failed to dislodge the Guru from Anandpur through their own efforts, they sought the help of the *faujdar* of Sirhind and, then of the Mughal Emperor. These forces attacked the Guru again and again but he did not feel dejected by the rough and tumble of life. In fact greater the adversity, the

stronger was his will to meet it.

None of the battles he fought was of his seeking. He never attempted to annexe even an inch of the enemy's territory as a result of his military successes. He made no prisoners of war and did not sack or plundered any town. His struggle was against political tyranny, religious intolerance and the oppression of the poor and the down-trodden and for nothing more. He had no territorial ambition and no lust for earthly power.

During his travels in the Malwa (in the south-east of the Punjab) some Sikhs of that area approached the Guru and implored him to give up his struggle. To this the Guru replied, "Whosoever wants to live in ignoble peace, may compromise with tyranny. I would struggle on till I have the last breath in me, so will those who chose to follow me."

The Sikh scripture says :—

*He alone is to be recognized as brave,  
Who fights for the cause of helpless and down trodden,  
Who may be torn to pieces and done to death,  
But who does not give up his struggle for His cause.*

The great Guru was himself a great soldier and a great general. His arrows caused havoc in the enemy ranks which he struck with deadly accuracy. His personal participation in battle infused in his followers a new spirit, and, many a time converted a doubtful encounter into a sure victory.

Whether in peace or in war, his policy was the



same. Even in the days of fighting he never stooped to unfair means, deceit or falsehood. He never killed his adversaries by surprise attacks nor did he ever shoot at such of them as were taking rest and were not actually engaged in fighting. In no case would he slay a coward, nor put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. He ordered his Sikhs neither to molest women, nor to assault a sick or an unarmed person.

He won most of the battles because he was fighting to defend the religious values established by the Gurus before him, and for the vindication of which his father and great grand-father (Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Arjan Dev) had sacrificed their lives.

#### • NO ENEMY OF ISLAM OR HINDUISM

The Guru had equal respect and regard for both the Hindu and Muslim religions. He had among his admirers and followers both Muslims and Hindus. In his army also he had men of both the religions, and it is a historical fact that both the communities fought equally well on his side.

In the battle of 'Bhangani' he received much help from the Muslim Faqir Pir Sayyid Budhu Shah. At the time of his escape from Chamkaur, it were again two Muslims Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan who helped him. In the *Bachittar Natak* Guru Gobind Singh writes :

*The temple (of the Hindus)  
and the mosque (of the Muslims) are the same,*

*Puja and Nawaz are the same,*

*All men are one.*

*It is only under different influences  
of different countries that they appear to be different.*

*Their eyes are alike, their ears are alike,*

*They have similar bodies and builds—*

*A compound of earth, fire and water.*

*Allah (the Muslim God) and Abhekh (the Hindu  
God) are the same ;*

*The Puran and the Quran are the same ;*

*They are alike the creation of the One.*

*Again, says he, "Some have become Sanyasis  
and some Yogis, some are Brahamcharis and  
some are known as Jatis. Some call themselves  
Hindus, some Turks, some Rafies and some  
Imamshafis.*

*Recognize all mankind as one. Karta and Karim  
are the same.*

*Raziq and Rahim are the same—entertain no  
doubt about it."*

✓ He was a sworn enemy of the caste system and  
was resolutely determined to put an end to the  
exploitation of man by man. He did not fight any  
community, but fought against aggression, oppression and  
suppression from whichever quarter it came. He fought  
against Mughal imperialism because it had degenerated  
into tyranny. He fought against incorrigible hill rajas  
who happened to be Hindus, and he fought against the  
corrupt masands who were Sikhs.



## AN UNIQUE DEMOCRAT

Guru Gobind Singh was a staunch believer in true democracy. He not only stressed the equality between man and man, but also brought Guruship to the level with his followers.

It was certainly a revolutionary and an extremely democratic step when after initiating the "Five beloved-ones", he knelt down and asked them to initiate him also in the same manner. His memorable words that "Guru is the Khalsa and Khalsa is the Guru" and further that "Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled, know ye that I am there" bring out in unmistakeable terms how keen the Guru was to see his followers lead a corporate life. His abolition of the personal guruship and his desire for the Sikhs to hold general councils and to decide things by a "*Gurmatta*" or a resolution passed in the presence of the Holy Book testify to the fact that he fully advocated the sovereignty of the people. He wrote :—

"It is through their (*the Khalsa*) kindness that I have won battles, through their favour that I have distributed bounties to the poor. It is through them that all my woes are gone and my house is again overflowing with material possession. Through their kindness have I smothered my enemies. Through their favour am I instructed in wisdom. I am exalted, because they have exalted me, otherwise there are crores of poor ones like me wandering about luckless and friendless."

He not only laid down the rules of democracy for

his followers, but obeyed them himself in his own life time. The following example would bear this out—

At Chamkaur when Guru was surrounded by the enemy, he had hardly forty men with him. Most of them died on the battle-field and only a few were left. They entreated him to make an escape, but he was adamant. Finding no other way left five of them formally passed a resolution as Guru Panth asking the Guru to leave Chamkaur. The Guru had now no alternative. Finding his own injunctions being used against him, he felt helpless and he obeyed.

Such was Guru Gobind Singh who was far ahead of his time. He gave the message of equality for mankind long before the philosophers of the West.

### A GREAT NATIONAL HERO

Guru Gobind Singh had dedicated the whole of his life to the service of the poor and the down-trodden and he sacrificed his all to raise them to a position of honour in society.

In the field of patriotism, hardly can anyone come even a near second to him. History can show no parallel wherein a child of nine years had suggested to his father to lay down his life for the cause of DHARMA.

He had an invincible spirit which refused to surrender to tyranny and aggression, and he stood up with courage unsurpassed in the history of Our Nation and challenged the greatest of the great powers in the world of his time.



Some writers have tried to interpret the Sikh movement as a provincial movement and the Gurus as the Punjabi reformers. But this would prove to be a mistaken view if one would try to understand the fundamental historical facts of the lives and teachings of the Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh did not fight for any territory or wordly power, or against any religion or sect. He fought to uphold the dignity of man, to free the mind of man from bondage, and to uproot oppression and tyranny religious, social and political.

Guru Gobind Singh was far above these small and narrow thinkings. We come across the words HINDUSTAN and HINDUSTANI in the writings of the Guru and not Punjabi anywhere.

He had his disciples all over the country. His letters to Dacca, Chitagong and Assam show that he received his war elephants, shields and weapons from his Bengali and Assami disciples.

At the time of the creation of KHALSA the 'Five-selected ones—the 'PANJ PAYARE' came from different parts of India and from different castes and classes. Banda Singh, the first military commander of the Khalsa after Guru Gobind Singh was a Kashmiri.

Of the three Takhts or Sikh seats of authority which he created, only one is in the Punjab — the other two are in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

History of India would have been quite different

if Guru Gobind Singh had not appeared on the scene just at that moment and his Khalsa had not given a death blow to Mughal tyranny and Afghan usurpation in the eighteenth century.

Guru Gobind Singh thus occupies a very high place amongst the great heroes of the country. He was a true DHARAM PATTI.





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**DEG TEGH FATEH**